

**Sawin House Study Committee**

**March 19, 2015, 7:00 PM**

**Community Meeting Room, Morse Institute**

**MINUTES**

**APPROVED**

Present: Steve Evers, Randy Johnson, Elissa Landre, Chris Milford, John Moran, Janice Parsons, George Sawin, Ken Soderholm, Wayne Szretter, Amy Ward, James Williamson.

Absent: Michael Linehan, Stephen Roche

Meeting was called to order by Chair Ken Soderholm at 7:05 PM.

Minutes of the February 24, 2015 meeting were reviewed. Motion to accept as drafted, by Mr. Evers, second by Mr. Moran. Approved: unanimous vote.

Mr. Soderholm addressed an email from Mr. Sawin that stated that the thoughts shared by committee members about the future of the Sawin house went beyond the charge given by Town Meeting. In discussion, Mr. Sawin stated that some voices were left out of the discussion such as Native American voices, historical experts and legal experts.

Mr. Soderholm stated that he respectfully disagreed and feels that much is being learned from the current discussions. The article to continue the committee and its charge to Fall Town Meeting has been accepted by both the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen. Anyone is welcome to attend the meetings and written statements can be accepted as well

Mr. Johnson was concerned about possible demolition plans concerning the building. Ms. Landre stated that as long as there is a process ongoing to determine the future, there are no such plans. Mr. Johnson requested that language confirming this stance be placed in the interim report.

Mr. Sawin suggested that no recommendation about the house needs to be made. Mr. Johnson stated that it would not be good to NOT have a recommendation.

Mr. Soderholm commented that the fact that we are working on this issue and are willing to continue to the Fall Town Meeting is an indication of progress.

Mr. Sawin had his thoughts written up as a draft report of the Committee rather than as reflecting his views. He mentioned concerns about other opinions. Ms. Ward suggested that Mr. Sawin contact people he wished to have heard by the committee.

Ms. Landre said that any legal concerns about the deed need to be put in writing and directed to Mass Audubon's legal department.

Mr. Soderholm suggested committee members review thoughts that had been submitted in order to find common ground. On April 7, a draft report needs to be written.

Ms. Parsons talked about the site and family has having educational importance for the town and thinks that is an important thread of the conversation.

Ms. Landre spoke on behalf of enhanced interpretation of the sites in the Sanctuary, to reflect the Sawin Family story.

Mr. Sawin feel that everyone recognizes that the house and property are important to the town.

Mr. Williamson wanted to know more about Mass Audubon's position which Ms. Landre explained. The house location is not a good area for people to be entering the Sanctuary. It is an unprotected access which brings liability issues. If a benefactor steps forward, Mass Audubon needs to see a concrete proposal.

Discussion ensued about the cost of renovating or restoring the house as a monument, not to be inhabited, and covering a footprint in keeping with the original saltbox. Hundreds of thousands of dollars will be necessary for anything that has a structure. Mr. Milford mentioned that house museums are very expensive to construct and retain interest for about a week and a half. Mr. Evers commented that buildings work best if they're occupied as a house or office. This was why the Natick Historical Society proposal was desirable. The educational story of the Sawins and the Native Americans would be told amid the 17<sup>th</sup> century artifacts of the house in an occupied building.

Mr. Moran asked about a suitable memorial at the site, if the house was to be relocated, mentioning a memorial to Henry Beston's Outermost House.

Mr. Soderholm mentioned that he is enamoured of the story and the whole site and feels the town is fortunate that this site has been preserved, rather than becoming a housing development.

Mr. Johnson advocated for members of the committee to work for passage in Natick of the Community Preservation Act (which could have made a positive difference several years ago, had it been passed). To find a program compatible with current ownership, could it be repurposed for field research or storage?

Mr. Soderholm stated that the building must be gutted, if it is kept, to a shell, and stabilized. Any reconstruction involves conforming to a new building code. Storage is an occupation requiring such conformity.

Mr. Szretter suggested that the history of the location is so important that it need to be preserved. The building has been changed so much but the story can be saved.

Mr. Soderholm reiterated his invitation that anyone is welcome to attend committee meetings and speak. Mr. Williamson will contact an expert from Concord who might be able to share helpful advice. Ms. Landre said that faculty from the Fiske Center of Archeological Research, UMass Boston, will visit once the snow melts.

Preparing for the next meeting, Mr. Szretter suggested working on a matrix during the meeting. It was informally agreed to work in the format with a white board on Tuesday night. A list of ideas will be listed and members will weight them.

The next meeting will be Tuesday March 24, 2015 at 7:00 PM in the Community Meeting Room of the Morse Institute.

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Moran, second by Mr. Evers. Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

